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AN

EXAMINATION

OF

MR. DUFIEF'S

PHILOSOPHICAL NOTIONS,

WITH A CRITICISM

UPON HIS

System and Mode of Teaching Languages.

IN FOUR LETTERS.

BY JOHN MANESCA,

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*** My countrymen who live in this country, the natives whose esteem and friendship I have the advantage of enjoying; finally, all men who have at heart the diffusion of truths which may be useful to the art of teaching in general, are respectfully requested to promote the circulation of these letters, so far as they may think them conducive to that end.

LETTER I.

Mr. Dufief,

We are all weak and limited beings; all more or less subject to physical and moral evils; and all prone to occasional intellectual aberrations: no one, therefore, who is possessed of a moderate share of humility, and feels the infirmities of his nature, will wantonly sneer at those whom Heaven has visited with inevitable misfortunes of any kind, and, least of all, at those who, with honest intentions, labour under any mental obliquity. But if nothing could excuse him, how much soever entitled to our pity and assistance, who, afflicted with a contagion, would wilfully expose his fellow mortals to the same calamity, how much more deserving of our reproof is he, who exerts his utmost endeavours to spread abroad his errors, and corrupt the minds of others! In both cases, I apprehend, it is the duty of every individual to warn the community of the danger, and, as far as his abilities enable him, to point out the best means to avoid it.

The latter case, sir, is precisely yours; and if at this moment I step between you and the public, it is not with any premeditated intention to reproach you, or to cause you any pain; it is, merely to put society on their guard against the dangerous consequences of your errors.

I have chosen the epistolary form of style, because it appears to me best suited to my limited knowledge of the English language; and as, in controverting a doctrine, it is impossible to avoid speaking of its author, I fancied that it would be more consonant with propriety, to address my letters to you personally.

You have already attributed to selfish motives the censure I before directed against your mode of teaching, and you may possibly reiterate, in this instance, your former charge; I will, therefore, candidly, and once for all, answer it, stale and idle as it is.

I have frequently heard, in the course of my life, most solemn protestations of disinterestedness, but I never heard them from the most disinterested people; nor have I often seen them produce any effect but upon the simpleton, who knew not that self-interest is the twin-brother of time, and as old as the world. That the motives, by which I am here actuated, have some relation to my own interest, cannot be a matter of surprise to sensible men, whilst my assertions to the contrary could but create their suspicions, and excite their contempt. I therefore frankly declare, that, as a

teacher of the French language, who has for seventeen years, arduously and honestly laboured in his profession, it is my interest to enlighten the public mind upon a subject little understood, in order to enable it to distinguish and appreciate true merit wherever it may happen to be found. You see, sir, that my interest coincides with the interest of others, and is in perfect harmony with that of society: I sincerely wish you could say as much to your advantage.

It would be unavailing to object, that, if your system of teaching is erroneous, and your Nature Displayed good for nothing, they must both fall by their own inertness, and, consequently, deserve no criticism; for I beg you to observe, that what is absurd and mischievous does not appear so to every eye. This is the reason why error, let it be ever so preposterous, and its existence ever so ephemeral, is not the less to be dreaded. Your errors particularly are such as to cause infinite evils before and after they are exploded.

Had not D'Alembert asserted, that "to acquire a language, the only thing necessary is, to learn a dictionary by heart;" if, in your youth, you had not read, that "a language is nothing but a series of sentences;" that "children learn their mother tongue by whole sentences, and by heart;" or, if the fallacy of those erroneous premises of yours had been demonstrated as soon as they were publicly asserted, it is very probable, that their baneful effects would not now be the scourge of the present generation, whom you would have spared the poisonous homage of your *Nature Displayed*.

When I reflect on the importance of the matter with respect to its tendency upon the mind, and the art of teaching in general, I feel not a little proud, that among many able men, my professional brethren in this country, it has fallen to my lot to expunge those unsound and pernicious notions which you are labouring, with so much industry, and not altogether unsuccessfully, to spread among the community; and, at the same time, I cannot help thinking that I shall not be a little indebted to you for the honour which may happen to be the reward of my labours and success; consequently, without considering whether in this, your agency be direct or indirect, voluntary or not, I beg you to allow me to express here, by anticipation of gratitude, my sincere wish that I may succeed in converting your mind to more rational principles. But, alas! I dare not entertain the least hope of bringing about that happy revolution; at your period of life, when a man has for so great a number of years adopted and cherished errors, which have, in some sort, become identified with his interest and feelings, it is folly to expect him to part with them, until he shall make his final exit from this sublunary world. Sound arguments, genuine syllogisms, have as little effect upon certain minds, as milk of roses, or almond paste would, in restoring to their primitive softness and colour, the tar-saturated hands of an old weather-beaten sailor.

It has already been premised, that my only purpose in writing the present letters, is to expose the folly of your doctrine, and animadvert upon your professional creed and deeds. The respect I owe to myself, my duty to the public, and charity towards a fellow creature, are sure pledges, that I shall not step beyond the range of literary censure, and expose myself to be reproached with having caused to you any mortification, besides that which you may experience from that censure, and for which I cannot, with justice, be blamed or made responsible.

Before a tribunal endued with the faculty of appreciating human feelings, and empowered to judge accordingly, a little departure from my intended moderation, might, perhaps, find indulgence and mercy; for it would not probably condemn me, without having dispassionately weighed the natural effects of your long settled resolution, to put down all teachers who would not teach after your method; but no such tribunal exists, and I will not appeal to your heart. After all, it is long since I pardoned you for your unkind scheme, because experience showed me, that you were actuated by a very laudable, philanthropic enthusiasm, which induced you to think that starving a few teachers, was a cheap return for the immeasurable benefits you intended to confer upon mankind.

Yet, I confess, it was not without some difficulty I could reconcile my mind to the belief that you were in earnest in your pretensions concerning teaching. "It is possible," said I to myself, "that when yet but a brainless youth, he really thought he had made a matchless discovery; but now, in the autumn of his life, enriched with experience, matured by reflection; now, that his mind has meditated upon the nature, constitution, and practical use of a living language, is it possible, unless he is entirely deaf to the voice of common sense, that he should sincerely believe that a whole, nay, any fraction of a practical language, can be compressed within the limits of an octavo, and that the learning by heart of that octavo, *supposing it practicable*, will insure, in thirty-six, or any number of lessons, the practical knowledge of that living language? No," thought I, "he might as well believe that the science of arithmetic may be found in an octavo, full of numbers, and that the learning by heart of these numbers, would teach the science of arithmetic, that is, teach the faculty of combining and expressing numbers!" In short, such appears to me the absurdity of your system and book, that rather than suspect that your mind was so far decayed as not to be sensible of so palpable a fact, I concluded that you were a wily experimenter upon the credulity of your fellow mortals. I crave your pardon, sir, for the mistake; for I soon altered my mind. By reading your book with attention, and closely observing your professional conduct, I was presented with too many opportunities for ascertaining the extent and depth of your understanding, to doubt any longer of the sincerity of your professions. You are

sincere: nobody ought to entertain the smallest doubt of it, after your repeated assertions that the public is very much enlightened upon matters of teaching; for with so high an opinion of the public's tact at discrimination in abstract subjects, you would most certainly not enjoy a moment's rest about the ultimate fate of your book, if you did not honestly and piously believe them to be what you assert, namely, the precious offspring of a real genius.

Compelled, as I am, to the painful task of undeceiving you concerning your book and doctrine, I shall have, at least, the gratification of tranquilizing your mind upon those discriminating powers which you fancy the public possess in so high a degree.

The public, taken collectively, understands nothing about so intricate a subject as teaching is; and when it is led to any preference with respect to teachers, it either obeys the impulse, which, in the long run, real success seldom fails to create; or it suffers itself to be carried along with the tide of factitious fame. Individually, every member of the community has his own particular callings, out of the circle of which, how intelligent and well informed soever he may otherwise be, he can hardly exert his judgment, still less trust it.

Even the great names you delight so much in bringing forward, could not be vouchers in favour of your works, granting that the respectable personages who possess them, had had the courage to examine thoroughly the abstruse and intricate contents of your *Nature Displayed;* for do not imagine, sir, that statesmen, magistrates, lawyers, physicians, divines, are better qualified to be judges in the art of teaching, than architects, apothecaries, silversmiths, or merchants. Indeed, I know of a man whose approbation of your book and system would have raised your fame sky-high, a man whose head, in such matters, has more weight than a whole living generation: I wonder you never thought of bringing over from Europe a genuine certificate from *Pestalozzi;* with such a document, you could have scornfully laughed at any challenge, I, or any other antagonist, might have sent you.

This disability of the public to judge in certain matters, accounts for those exalted reputations, under the illegitimate sway of which, the world is kept for a while in reverential admiration, till a few individuals appear to constitute a competent jury, whose verdict, at last, echoing from mouth to mouth, blows away the spurious fame which,—

"Like the baseless fabric of a vision, leaves not a rack behind."

It cannot be denied, that there is something imposing in a big book, which keeps in awe the stoutest critic. People, who take for granted that its bulk and weight are sure prognostics of the depth of its contents, are pretty well disposed to conclude that the author is a great man, and the wary, who do not share in the conceit, are jealous detractors. I am fully aware that the task which I am im-

posing upon myself is by no means an easy one. When truth and error are within the apprehension of men, neither requires demonstration; like light and darkness, they strike all mortals before whose eyes they happen to be placed: but when they are buried under a heap of rubbish, besides the skill requisite to bring them within the perception of all, an uncommon share of industry, courage, and perseverance is indispensable.

In the letter I had the pleasure to write to you in January last, I endeavoured to show the preposterousness of your notions and pretensions, by a plain sort of reasoning a *posteriori*, suited to all classes of readers, to every capacity, and the consequence of which might have been deduced by the weakest intellect in the community; yet you saw or feigned to see in it, a mere flimsy ebullition of a jealous rival, who had in vain looked after more philosophical arguments. Now, sir, since you will have it so, I must use a dialectic of a more regular character. I shall try, in the present letters, to treat the subject in a manner more agreeable to that portion of society which has more leisure to think and reflect upon abstract matters, and whose opinions direct those of the rest. To those persons, I will endeavour to show, that a spoken and written language, either considered in a practical or theoretical point of view, as a branch of knowledge, is by no means such a trifle as you would have people to believe; that no cheapness of teaching can make up for the mischievous consequences of learning badly; that the principles upon which your system is grounded are false; and, in short, that your mode of instruction, adapted to the French, or *any other language*, as expounded in that production of yours, *miscalled*, *Nature Displayed*, is preposterous, impotent, and frightfully dangerous.

J. MANESCA,
French Teacher, No. 24 Liberty-Street.

New-York, October 6th, 1825.

LETTER II.

Mr. DUFIEF,

I should never have presumed to address you thus publicly, in a language which is not my own, if I had not been irresistibly urged by the conviction of the importance and general utility of the present discussion; this consideration will, I hope, plead for me, and induce liberal minded men to forgive me for my temerity.

No one is more aware than I am, of the difficulties to be encountered by him who undertakes to communicate his thoughts through the medium of a foreign language. Like the dwarf who has been intrusted with the sword of a giant, I am, at this very

moment, overwhelmed with the weight of the weapon that I am timidly wielding. At almost every period, I find myself at a loss in the selection of the terms proper to represent my ideas, and like the forlorn and hungry traveller, cast upon a desert island, amidst noxious and nutritive plants, equally unknown to him, I must leave it to chance or a blind instinct to determine my choice. Therefore I need, and I crave indulgence; and still, sir, although I have not had the advantage of being taught the English after your method, I can truly say that I am an old scholar.

Yet, if we take your word, you have made the acquirement (1) of a living language a mere trifle; the French and Spanish, through the means of your *Nature Displayed*, can easily be communicated from *one single individual*, to *any number* of human beings—*the more the better*; and any person, no matter of what sex or age, no matter whether wise or foolish, ignorant or well-informed, will, after a few school recitations, master the language, and have it at his command as readily as a song. Sir, if this is true, you are a demi-god; if false, what are you?

Should a reflecting man be asked, what language is, would he not be inclined to define it as a sage of old defined eternity; viz. an immense circle, the centre of which is every where, and its circumference no where? For what is language, but an infinite series of *combinations of signs* to represent an infinite series of ideas, incessantly succeeding each other in the human mind? Yet you pretend that a *limited* number of combinations, ready made, and learned by heart, (2) will constitute the knowledge of a language!

(1) A French Ear, as Mr. Dufief calls it, means nothing, or it signifies at least, that he will in 36 lessons, make better scholars than other teachers. "His scholars," he says, "will be superior to any one, who, having for *one year*, studied the French in Paris, should, besides, have had, between his lessons, the advantage of practising with the natives." Nay, Mr. D.'s pupils, after their 36 lessons, are to know so much of the language, to understand it so well, to master it so readily, that they want no such thing as boarding, for some time, in a French family, in order to practise and become more familiar with the language. This boarding in French families, he *intimates*, is a trick of unsuccessful teachers, who thus get rid of their scholars, and afterwards take to themselves credit for the progress which their pupils may have made in their intercourse with French natives.

(2) The expression to "*learn by heart*," as it is generally understood, as Mr. Dufief understands it, and finally, as I understand it, signifies to repeat, over and over, *in rotation* from the book, and with as much attention as possible, a series of words or phrases, or whatever is to be committed to memory, till by dint of repetition, such series of words or sentences are so well associated in the mind, that, at any future period, without the assistance of the book, that series of words or phrases will recur to the mind, in the *very same order in which they have been learned*. Now, I say, that this is not nature's mode of teaching. I maintain and I shall prove, that he who teaches a language in this manner, understands nothing about the relations which exist between language and the human mind, is a perfect stranger to the nature of memory, and that, far from obtaining any success, he must produce all the evils which are the necessary consequences of an infringement of nature's laws.

You speak of nature's method; you flatter yourself that you have discovered her mysterious process; how has it not come into your mind, that even a whole life might be too short for the learning of a language after that cautious teacher's system? Has your wisdom never suggested to you, that notwithstanding her matchless skill, nature can impart language but in an exact ratio with the expansion of the mind, and that at the age of one year, two, three, four, or more years, she never allows her pupil (because it is impossible that she should) more faculty of expression than he has ideas to express? The result of that inimitable process is, that as a man is growing up, nay, at any time of his life, besides his practising, he is also learning his mother tongue, so long as he is acquiring new ideas, and that he never knows all the vernacular language, if his mind has not received all known ideas.

Language is so immense, so complicated an instrument; the faculty of playing upon that instrument is so wonderful, and the means to be resorted to in order to communicate that faculty are so intricate, and require so much art and caution, that nature has not willed, that the teaching of our native tongue should be entrusted to human professorships; yet, sir, *you* will teach any grown person to express the infinite number of his ideas in less time than nature requires to enable a child two years old to stammer out its few scanty ideas!

Any man a little familiar with this subject, can perceive at once, that your system was built upon a few borrowed notions, the soundness of which you never took the trouble to question. It is not in books, sir, that nature should be studied; it is by retiring within our own minds; it is by closely observing the links of attributes which are the sources of our perceptions. Nature is not a lady, as you have gallantly, but very unphilosophically entitled her; *nature* is the whole series of causes and effects, or rather of antecedents and consequents; and when we are told that something is, it behooves us before we believe, to ascertain by our *own* observations, whether the assertion is warranted by the relations existing between such series. The vulgar too frequently suffer others to think for them; but the man of sense, he particularly, who has any pretension to teach his fellow mortals, should not imitate the vulgar. No human authority whatever, should excuse him from examining that which is offered for his assent.

The reading man who is not endowed with the inestimable faculty of thinking, will ever be the dull echo of others. I will not assert, that your great taste, when you were young, for abstract reading, is the very cause which now deprives you of all title to public regard; but I cannot forbear to give it as my opinion, that it is to be lamented you had no better guide than yourself in the choice of the intellectual food which your juvenile mind found in

the books of Locke, Condillac, D'Alembert, Stewart, &c.; for, unable to comprehend and profit by the precious truths which those great men have revealed to mankind, you too eagerly adopted a few errors, the tribute of which, as mortals, they have paid to humanity; errors that might have for ever remained in oblivion, had it not been your ill-fated lot to revive and disseminate them, with their monstrous progeny, among your contemporaries.

Persons to whom I have not the advantage to be personally known, might, perhaps, imagine, that animated by a spirit of rivalship, I am disposed to exaggerate your incapacity, and magnify the absurdity of your notions, in order the more effectually to prejudice the public against your book and your method of teaching; therefore, I beg them to open your "*Nature Displayed*," and suffer me to expose to their view the most remarkable features of that singular philosophy, which has led you to your extraordinary mode of teaching.

First, let us observe this quotation from *Dugald Stewart, at the bottom of the 13th page of your preface, 5th edition*: "Many authors have spoken of the wonderful mechanism of speech, but *no one has hitherto* attended to the *more wonderful* mechanism which is put into action behind the scene."

Well, there is no man who, after reading this in your book, would not have concluded that you were a sound proselyte to genuine philosophy; I, for my part, thought so myself, when I first saw that you had quoted so notable a saying of the Edinburgh philosopher; but alas, I was soon convinced that it is easier to make quotations, than to comprehend and profit by them. Only let us look at the 12th page, and we shall have a specimen of your metaphysics.

"If we attentively observe the mind in the operation of thinking, we immediately become sensible that *it consists entirely in speaking to itself*, that is to say, in *pronouncing mentally* whole sentences, *without which thoughts could neither exist*, nor be noticed *by itself*; and that *thinking is nothing else*."

As I am a poor judge of English, I leave American readers to form their own estimate of the clearness and beauty of the above sentence; it is not for the *letter*, it is for the *spirit* that I shall reserve my encomium.

Then, sir, considering that *thinking is nothing but speaking*, parrots must be deep thinkers; dumb people, of course, do not think at all; children, before they begin to speak, have no thoughts, no minds! This is a glorious philosophy for tattlers of all sexes, times, and countries! I wonder, however, what could induce mankind to contrive language, since there was no thinking antecedent to speaking!

On the same page, 13th, we read the following admirable corollary to the above pithy proposition:

"These propositions being *allowed*, and they are *incontrovertible*, it follows that memory can *scarcely* be said to exist in the mind, without the external ear, which supplies it with sounds that are repeated mentally, when the act of thinking takes place."

Now, sir, I have nothing to do with your or any other man's orthodoxy, and if, *en passant*, I make so free as to observe, that your philosophy concerning the mind smacks somewhat of materialism, it is only to remind you, in case you send your books to Spain, to make the Dons pay you beforehand, for they do not joke upon the matter; and your *Nature Displayed* might well experience at their hands a rather too warm expression of their fondness for *auto de fé*.

To return to your corollary: "without the external ear," you say, "there is *scarcely* any memory in the mind."

There is something *incontrovertibly* curious in this philosophy; let us see again: "no speaking, no thinking, no mind; no external ear, no speaking, no mind; therefore, no external ear, *scarcely* any memory."

I have *scarcely* any snuff in my snuff-box. That man has *scarcely* sufficient modesty to restrain him from saying, that he is an unrivalled genius. In both these sentences, the adverb *scarcely* implies, of course, *positively some: there is some snuff*, and *there are some remains of modesty;* your scarcely, therefore, signifies likewise, *a little portion of memory*. Now, only think of a small portion of the memory *in the mind* of a man who has *no mind!* a *little remembering of no ideas*. But, after all, why should the Irish have the exclusive privilege of making bulls?

At any rate, hares have most potent memories, jack-asses too; dumb people, who, as it is *allowed*, have no mind, and do not think at all, possess *scarcely* any. All this is assuredly *incontrovertible*.

After this, you may, indeed, well exclaim: "I fearlessly challenge *all* the instructors in Europe and America, to point out what elementary principle of education has been omitted or overlooked, and in what this system can be at variance with itself."

Be comforted, sir; it would puzzle longer eared folks than they are, to find your system at variance with itself; a system so perfectly consistent, so admirably harmonized, so much itself! poor souls! they will no more think of accepting your challenge, than you thought of answering mine, which you received last January.

How incontrovertible soever your system appeared to your *mind's ears*, having less confidence in the capacity of those of your fellow men, you thought that a few difficulties apparently started by your antagonists, and smartly retorted by you, would set it off to better advantage; you therefore so shaped five objections, that you could answer them in such a manner as to strike dumb the longest eared intellects.

We will content ourselves to take notice of the first, which deserves all our attention.

"That the ordinary mode of teaching language by the study of *grammar*, is entirely discarded, and *grammar* is merely an accessary, not a principal."

This objection, viewed in its proper light, is forcible and is unanswerable; for the word *grammar*, taken in its real acceptation, *does not mean* rules or classifications, neither does it signify conjugations of verbs, declensions of nouns and pronouns; but *grammar*, in its true signification, is the *combining* and *composing* of signs, in order to represent our ideas, which, like the views in the kaleidoscope, are constantly changing and varying. Now, sir, if we consider the term in this light, the objection which you set up against yourself, becomes an unequivocal censure of your method of teaching, which presents nothing but sentences, *en masse*, already combined, to be learned by heart, that is, in other words, to be learned ungrammatically.

How then have you dared to bring up so formidable, so overwhelming an objection? Does the gladiator turn his deadly weapon against his own breast? No: but by skilfully substituting in your category, the *figurative* meaning of the word grammar for its proper sense, you rendered the objection foolish and harmless, and its refutation a mere slight-of-hand, which had the appearance of a triumph.

"In considering this objection," say you, "it is necessary, first, to inquire what is the nature of *grammar*."

At the reading of this fair beginning, who would not think that you are going to pronounce your doom? But your reader is soon made quite easy upon this score.

"Does grammar," you continue, "*contain* the materials of language?" To that question your answer is, "*certainly not*."

Like the oracle of Delphi, your dialectic wants a little helping. When you ask whether *grammar contains* the materials of language, you surely mean to say, *is grammar among the materials* of language? Would you say, *bricks contain the materials* of houses? Bricks *are* some of the materials, but they do not *contain* the materials of houses. Let us then establish your question upon a better footing, with respect to English and rationality, and present it under the following form:

"Is grammar among the materials of language?" To which you gravely answer, "*certainly not*."

Yet other men would have replied: "*it most certainly* is." Listen to their reasons, sir: "If *grammar* is the *combining* of the signs which represent our ideas, as there can be no language without *this combination, grammar* is in language, what extension, form, and existence are in bodies, and it is nonsense to say that *grammar* is not among the materials of language, since the latter

could not exist without it; consequently, *grammar is among the materials of language.*

How is it then, that your "*certainly not,*" which is the extreme opposite of common sense, does not, at first, appear so, even to an inattentive reader? Because, in your premises, you childishly or adroitly presented the word grammar in its figurative sense, by which substitution, the question assumes in the mind of the reader the following shape:

"Are *the books called grammars*, the materials of language?" as an answer to which, he does not even think of questioning the propriety of your "certainly not," particularly, if he considers the admirable consequences he is suddenly enabled to deduce from so useful a piece of information.

For instance: *Is the dictionary of music of J. J. Rousseau a symphony? Certainly not.* Is a treatise on architecture *a palace? Certainly not.* Is the family cook-book among the materials of a plum pudding, or a fricassee of chickens? *Indeed not!* Thus it is, that a spark from true genius produces a thousand lights, dispelling the darkness in which human intellect is immersed!

But, sir, because you teach without the assistance of those books called grammars, which it must be allowed, are "*certainly not*" among the materials of language, is it a sufficient reason that *your book*, instead of calling which a *grammar*, you have dignified with the appellation of *Nature Displayed*, should be among the materials of language? Because, *like you*, nature uses none of these books called *grammars*, must we admit that you teach like her who teaches without your book? One might as soon maintain that, as neither you nor I wear wigs, we have the same way of thinking! Nature, in short, imparts the knowledge of language without the assistance of books, yet she teaches grammatically, because her pupils *learn how to compose* the language; whereas, your scholars learning *by heart* your book, full of sentences already composed, most *incontrovertibly* learn ungrammatically, which, in plain common language, signifies to learn nothing but a most ridiculous gibberish.

After having presented your contemporaries with this precious aphorism, that *books are not the materials of language*, you proceed, with your wonted sagacity, to inform them what those materials really are.

"Phrases," you say, "constitute the materials of language, without which it is impossible to speak or to write."

This is what one might call an equilateral apothegm, the three angles of which are admirably supported by the relative *which.*

Look at this, sir: "*It is impossible to speak or write without language.*"

Now at this: "*It is impossible to speak or write without the materials of language.*"

And lastly, at this angle: "*It is impossible to speak or write without phrases.*"

Blush, ye envious rivals! but start not when you see him whose philosophy is so firmly seated, place himself, *sans cérémonie*, between Locke and Newton!

Apropos, sir, you do not tell us how phrases constitute language. Is it as square feet of cloth constitute a great coat? as cubic inches of bones and flesh constitute men? Is it as bricks are the materials of houses, and the latter the materials of the city of New-York? If so, it must follow, that a certain number of square feet of cloth will constitute a great coat, no matter how they are respectively disposed; it follows, also, that, provided we join together, in any way, a number of cubic inches of bones, flesh, &c. we shall have as perfect a man as ever knew how to talk before he began to think. In short, if phrases constitute language, as bricks constitute houses, you must concede that any one is the present owner of a snug building, if he only possesses a number of bricks sufficient to build a house. Such, sir, are the consequences of your assertion, that *phrases constitute the materials of language.* Nay, they are more consistent with their conclusions; for you can easily be the real master of the necessary quantity of bricks, the possession of which, according to your doctrine, would render you the actual owner of any building to your liking; whereas you have not proved that your book contains all the phrases which constitute language; and it is evident to any man, who reflects for a moment, that it is impossible, after your mode of teaching, to become the real master of the thousandth part of your sentences.

It is thus, sir, that in science as in every thing else, a first deviation from the right path leads us, at every step, to misconstruction and error. That unfortunate notion of yours, that *language is nothing but phrases*, may be considered as the centripetal force by which the whole of your system is kept together, and after the destruction of which, all must tumble down; and I heartily wish, that you may find a sufficient consolation for the disappointment this will cause you, in the gratifying idea that your system is to be overturned by the destruction of that central force, after the annihilation of which, the universe itself could not stand a moment.

Look around, sir; observe, for a moment, with close attention, the beings and things which compose nature, and you will be compelled to acknowledge, that beings and things are not *merely* the *sum* of certain parts *arbitrarily defined*, but that they are the *result of the combination of their minutest parts*; which *minutest parts, together with their respective and general combinations*, constitute real existence. There is nothing, therefore, which *is a mere aggregate*;

every thing is the effect of a *specific combination*, *without which* "chaos would come again." There is no being whose existence is independent of the respective and general relations of its minutest parts. He who creates, combines; *he learns nothing, who learns not how to combine.* ANALYSIS, (3) (by the by, you speak a great deal of

(3) The word *analysis*, for which Mr D. seems to have a great liking, is paraded, in his book, in every possible attitude, amidst a constellation of great names, both ancient and modern; but all that show is not reasoning; and the names of Aristotle, Bacon, Locke, &c. a thousand times repeated, will never give respectability to error.

It is not through *analysis* that intellectual beings receive ideas, for ideas are indivisible. Analysis never produces positive knowledge, except when the object which is submitted to it, is *previously known*, as well as its elementary parts. It is never resorted to but by those who already know, when they see them, the constituent parts of the object which they are analyzing; and when the operation is done, it is beneficial only, so far as the elementary parts discovered are familiar to the operator; for, should there happen to be an elementary part unknown, no knowledge would result from the circumstance, except that some unknown thing had been perceived. Analysis gives *instruction* and *satisfaction* to an intelligent being, already informed of the existence and character of the things which he finds out in the composition of an object; satisfaction, because he recognises what he has already seen elsewhere; instruction, because he finds that things with which he is acquainted, are the elements of that object; besides that, he acquires no new knowledge. Analysis of unknown things is the study of idiots, and the philosophy of fools. In the book of Mr Dufief, this high sounding word means nothing but his ignorance and want of power to understand the books which he has read.

I ask any man of common sense, whether *reading*, *writing*, *drawing*, *music*, *dancing*, *walking*, and, finally, all kinds of mechanical arts, are taught analytically? I ask, whether little children begin to run, and then analyse a trip, in order to learn the steps of which a trip is composed? Whether they who learn dancing cut pigeon-wings first, and then analyse them, to learn their component parts? Who has ever seen a shoemaker unmake a shoe, that is, analyse it, for the instruction of his apprentice boy! How then will he teach him shoemaking? By teaching him first how to sew, how to cut a piece, to patch, to mend, to set a heel, or a sole, and, by and by, after repeated experiments, he will let him try to cut and join the separate pieces of a shoe, till at last the boy, having learned how to combine its divers parts, will make a whole one. Who but a chemist can undertake, succeed in, and profit by the analysis of a substance?

Suppose Mr. D. take apart all the pieces of a clock, would he think that he had made the analysis of the clock? A clockmaker only, who is acquainted with a clock, is able to make its analysis: and should he find in the machine a single spring or wheel, of which he could not comprehend the action and effect, his analysis would stop there, and he would have obtained no knowledge, except that a spring or wheel unknown to him was in the clock

Suppose Mr. Dufief should wish a clockmaker to teach him clock making, as he, Mr. D., teaches French, that is, *analytically*. The reluctant clockmaker, not to disoblige him, would begin by showing the *whole clock*, then he would unmake it, piece by piece, telling the name of every one, till the whole was analysed; then Mr. Dufief would understand clock making just as well as his French scholars understand French making. But, should the clockmaker be left free to teach, in the best manner his good sense might suggest to him, what would he do? Why, he would first show Mr. D. how to make, *himself, every separate piece of a clock*, beginning by the simplest; then he would explain to him the relation which the two simplest parts have to one

it, with your habitual sagacity,) analysis, I say, does not consist in merely observing the parts, for it is perfect only, when it takes notice of the respective and general relations of the elementary parts, and even then practical knowledge cannot be obtained, if *synthesis* is not immediately and properly resorted to.

Do you imagine, sir, that he who is ever so often shown the divers parts of a clock, will understand how to make and to combine them into a clock? No, no more than your scholars, even if it were possible for them to learn, pronounce, and remember all your sentences, would be enabled to combine language. A man who learns sentences by heart, is just as well informed concerning the language, as a person would be about clock making, who should be presented with boxes full of small and large wheels, screws, pins, &c. I do not say that such a scholar could not, *readily enough too*, say: "*comment vous portez vous?*" "*Bon jour, Mr.*" "*Il fait beau tems;*" and a few of such every day expressions, which any old illiterate woman can teach to a child; but I do assert, that two or three dozen, at most, of such sentences, badly pronounced, because learned from a book, would be the whole extent of his practical knowledge; as to his theoretical information, (I mean his capability to combine,) even concerning those very known sentences, it might be compared to the information about clock making, of him who should have a few clock wheels in his side pocket.

Expatiating more and more upon your first error, you say, (page xci.) "Language was made first, and grammar afterwards." If by *grammar* you mean books, the saying is a trite one, and not worth printing; if you allow us to consider the word grammar in its real acceptation, your maxim is as rational as if you had said, "Clocks were made first, and clock making afterwards." For there can no more be language without language making, which is grammar, than clocks without clock making, which is the art, the faculty of making clocks.

I am your obedient servant,

J. MANESCA.

another; and then he would teach him *how to join them*; after this, he would make him add a third, then a fourth, then a fifth part, taking care, in the mean time, to point out to him their respective and general relations; and by and by, Mr D. would succeed in understanding clock making, so far as to be able himself to analyse a clock. It is very likely that two or three hundred lessons would not be too many to learn clock making, after that method of teaching; but what are these to attain perfection in so ingenious an art!

To conclude: analysis is necessary to him whose business is to instruct others; for, having to show the elements, and the combining of them, of course he must himself decompose: but his pupils have nothing to do with decomposition. Nature's pupils never analyse; they extract parts, it is true, but it is to compose.

LETTER III.

Mr. Dufief,

The subject which furnishes the matter of these letters, is so extensive and so fruitful, that a book of the size of yours would hardly contain a full exposition of its divers parts; but as, for many reasons, it is not convenient for me to write a book, no choice is left me but that of delineating, within comparatively narrow limits, its most conspicuous and important branches. The public, I hope, and you, I suspect, will excuse me for not extracting any more from your *Nature Displayed*, and throwing into circulation, as I have done in my last, the precious ideas, which, like golden ore in a fertile mine, lay buried in its huge capacity. The first duty of a writer, is to show his respect for the mental powers of his readers; and when he has once pointed out to them the way, he must not presume they want his assistance to perceive that which, at every step, and from every direction, presses upon their senses.

I think it has been sufficiently demonstrated to every candid man, first, that language, considered as an object of knowledge, is not such a trifle as you would fain have it to be believed; 2dly, that phrases are *not* the *materials*, or, to mend your expression, the *elements* of language; from which last proposition, sound logic bids us conclude, that *nature cannot, does not, teach language to man by means of whole sentences.*

This being the case, tell us, sir, what becomes of your method of teaching? If it is made evident that *nature teaches not by whole sentences*, to what, we ask you, can we better compare your manner of teaching by whole phrases ready made, than to the way of any old illiterate woman, who, knowing no other trade, would set herself about teaching little children to say "*how do you do, bring me my spectacles,*" and the like? Nay, pardon me, you good, harmless woman, you spoil not your scholar's pronunciation, for you use no books. (1)

(1) When no improper means are used, the *sounds* and *articulations* of the French language will be easily acquired; but it requires uncommon prudence and attention on the part of a teacher, and *docility* from the scholar, to keep the latter from *accenting* French as he does the English words. Such a habit, being once contracted, *cannot be* eradicated, and it renders the speaking of our language extremely grotesque and ridiculous.

If nature teaches by whole sentences, please, sir, to inform us, how her pupil can guess at the judgment or *series of ideas*, that a sentence is intended to represent? You, *profound inquirer into nature's laws*,* tell us who is the interpreter for the child?—The outward things! which things? Is he not surrounded, pressed by, immersed in things? Do then explain to us how he will discriminate? But, this is not all: anterior to the above difficulty, there is another which you do not appear to have even suspected; yet one need not be a great philosopher to see that, before a child thinks of learning sentences, he *must be aware that they are made for signs*. What induced you to imagine that the child knows that sentences, which, to his ears are nothing but a succession of strange unmeaning sounds, are intended for signs, which he must attend to? Reveal to us how he is made sensible of that preliminary and indispensable truth?—Yet no: it would be cruel to press you so hard: let us, for argument's sake, admit what is above your power to explain, namely, that nature's pupil *is informed*, in some way or other which you cannot tell, *that a spoken sentence is intended for the sign of a judgment, which is in the mind of the speaker;* still returning to the first started difficulty, we summon you to demonstrate to us, by what means nature's pupil is led to hit upon

The pure French, as far as I am informed, is the only tongue in Europe that has no accent. Provençaux, Gascons, Languedocians, Basques, Bas-Bretons, and many others of our own country people, may pronounce our language with respect to *sounds* and *articulations*, as purely as the other French people; still they will accent our words, as they are used *from infancy* to accent those of their home dialect, by which they are immediately detected by their other countrymen. Among those divers sectional accents, some are not unpleasant, others are more or less disagreeble to a *French* ear, but all want loftiness and dignity. Cato delivering his soliloquy with the Gascon accent, or Antony his funeral and incendiary speech in the Provençal way, would most surely produce upon French people effects which would set at defiance the best skill of Mather. That very English accent, made still more intolerable by a bad pronunciation of *vowels* and *consonants*, is the stumbling block of an American; yet what may appear surprising is, that if properly guided, he will, sooner than the Provençal and Gascon, succeed in speaking the French free from his own national accent. The reason, however, is obvious; the American scholar may be well advised *before he speaks the French*, that is, before he has contracted bad habits; whereas, the Provençal, and the Gascon, *speak the French at home in their way*, before they think of, or even care for correcting themselves.

Suppose a French book of phrases, to be learned by heart, is put in the hands of a scholar twenty years old, that is, a person who, for at least twelve years, has been used to give to letters and syllables, *precisely the same as ours*, a certain value which is contrary to that which we give to them; he goes home and commits the sentences to memory, that is, he reads and repeats them by himself, over and over, till he thinks he knows them; now, the luckiest thing which may happen to him is, that he will immediately forget the whole, for there is, at *least*, twelve years against a few moments of hasty and superficial advice offered to his mind, engaged with many other things, that he will speak the little he may remember in the most unintelligible and ridiculous manner. Such a pronunciation can never be made good.

* One of the four lines which Mr. Dufief has engraved under his likeness

the *precise meaning* of a sentence. Suppose a dog snatch a piece of bread from the child's hand, and run away. The mother says, "The dog has taken George's bread." What reason can the child have to think that the whole of that sentence does not mean *the dog*, or simply, *the bread*, or *the act of running*, perhaps *of eating?* Why should he not as well believe that the sentence signifies the *feeling of hunger*, the ideas *of theft*, of violence, or in-injustice, &c. ? Neither do I see why, "*The dog has taken George's bread*," should not be construed by him into "*Dog!* give back to George his bread," or, in short, any other analogy. If you, sir, with the unspeakable advantage of a powerful mind, have been so far mistaken, as to imagine that there was *no thinking without speaking*, *no memory without external ears*, how can you expect a child, who takes its first lesson, to perceive that which baffles the efforts of reason to explain! You will, perhaps, tell us, that the child does not guess at the first trial, but that, after repeated experiments, it at last succeeds; but we do not wish to know when it guesses, we intreat you to tell us in what manner it is made to guess. Besides, we should have no sort of objection to grant you the experiments, if the dog were always at hand to snatch George's bread, *the very same piece of bread*, *from the same hand*, *in the same time*, *place*, *manner*, *circumstances*, *&c. &c.* all things necessary to constitute identity in the judgment; else, how could the child imagine, that the same series of sounds represent a second judgment, different in so many respects? But not to cavil with you, sir, and, putting aside all those philosophical niceties; I say, that many days, perhaps several weeks, nay, a whole year may pass, before the dog will snatch George's bread; therefore, there will be no more occasion for the sentence, which, of course, must become obsolete. Mind, sir, that *any other* phrase I might have chosen, would equally answer my purpose, for, I would in the same manner prove to you, that it would run the same chance of being seldom or never repeated to the child; consequently, we can easily conceive a new trial at every sentence spoken, but as it is never or hardly ever the same, we perceive no *experiments*. Yet it is only by *dint of experiments* that there is any learning of language; without frequent recurrences there can be no impressions made, no associations, no memory, no practice, no exercise, no habits of pronunciation: this is precisely your mode of teaching, but it is not nature's.

Another query. Thanks to the arts of writing and printing, the sentences in your system are bounded right and left by officious margins, which protect them from each other's contact, so that, like so many jewels in their case, they are perfectly distinguished by the eye, and your pupils, consequently, will never take two for one. But we are curious to hear from you, how a child can, with

the same precision, extract from the speech of those who surround him, a single sentence, and not a *word*, more or less?

If I were allowed to express my opinion upon that subject, I should say, that a child sees, hears, is surrounded by *individuals* only, and that, consequently, as soon as he has been so lucky as to guess that vocal sounds are intended for signs, he must necessarily apply them to *individuals*. Indeed, the real difficulty which an observer has to encounter, when he attentively examines nature's process in her teaching, is to find out how the child is led to perceive that sentences, ever so long, are not intended for simple signs.

"How do you call this? how do you call that?" are the constant questions of a foreigner who arrives in a strange country; not once in a hundred times will he be heard to inquire after the meaning of a whole sentence; and when he does, it is always for a phrase of an *immediate use* and *pressing necessity*, or for one of those *very few* sentences, which, in civil life, must be spoken twenty times in a day. For instance: "How do you call this, or that?" "Good day;" "Good morning;" "How do you do?" and a few more of the kind, which are no proofs that a language must be taught by whole phrases. I should be glad to know if deaf and dumb children are taught language by whole sentences!

A sentence is a compound sign, expressing a group of individuals; and when the child succeeds in *really* understanding a sentence, it is after, and because, he has been enabled, in some way or other, to distinguish every one of its elements, and recognise in each the particular sign for each of the parts of the group; for a sentence cannot be conceived otherwise than as is the group it is intended to represent, that is, through its elementary parts. A child could not be made sensible of the snatching of a piece of bread by a dog, if the *dog*, the *act*, and the *bread*, did not each separately strike his perceptive powers; in a like manner, the vocal proposition which is intended for the compound sign of such a scene, will never be comprehended by him, unless he has before been made acquainted with the intent of each of its separate parts. *Nature*, consequently, *teaches not language by whole sentences.*

What would a child do with a whole sentence, even if, at the first hearing, he could have suspected its import, its meaning, and pronounced, learned, and remember it? Use it! But there is no occasion for his using it: have we not seen that the *scene*, which produces the series of ideas expressed by that sentence, is not likely to recur twice in the course of a whole year? and is it not evident, that the learning of the child, being useless to him, would soon be forgotten?

Again: If nature teaches by whole sentences, which does her pupil learn first? He incessantly hears people talking around him; what choice will he make? Will you say that the phrases which interest him will be learned first? I will not object again,

that no choice can possibly be made before all the sentences are understood, for it would be driving you again into the very same corner where you have just been so uncomfortably placed; but I will reply to you, that nothing (2) of what others say, or *feel*, interests the child; for *it is not* the wants, the ideas of *others*, it is *his own* wants and ideas which interest him, and which he may feel inclined to express: the phraseology of the persons who surround him, having no sort of analogy to what he feels, cannot, therefore, attract his notice.

Now, if a child has a want which he is anxious to express, who can guess at that want, in order to teach him the sentence which expresses it? And should somebody be so lucky as to guess at it, and tell him the phrase, how could the child know that *it is a sign*, and that such a sign is the expression of his want? If you succeed in explaining, satisfactorily, the difficulties that I have just presented to you, I shall believe that nature teaches by whole sentences, that you have truly discovered her secret, and that your system of teaching is a rational one.

You will be pleased, sir, to bear in mind, that my object being only to demonstrate that nature teaches not by sentences, and that your mode of teaching after that manner cannot be nature's method, I am not bound to any thing, besides making my arguments good and conclusive concerning that point. My proving that you are not the favourite of nature, and that you possess none of her secrets, does not imply that I am under the obligation of showing that I am much more acquainted with her than you are, and in any way in her confidence. I hope I shall make it evident that your system is bad; but it will not follow, that I must present the world with a good one: nay, even not that I have a better one than yours. I disclaim all such consequences. I am a poor, obscure, very scantily informed individual, whose talents consist in a certain tact in detecting the errors of others, without even sufficient sense to mend his own, and who lays claim to no sort of personal merit, except that of being instinctively sensible that he is himself full of faults.

I resume my arguments. I have already said, that the child is surrounded by individuals only; that he sees, hears, feels only individuals. If that is true, his wants must partake of the character of his feelings, and the signs he needs to express those wants, are merely signs of individuals: therefore, his attention can be alive

(2) Even grown people are more inclined to express their ideas than to hear those of others; and it is not a little curious, that that natural disposition to prefer talking to suffering others to talk, is stronger with those whose moral constitution is more like that of children. The effects are somewhat different though, for talkative children learn, whilst adults, who are great talkers, seldom acquire much information.

only to the simplest elements of language, which are *words*, not *sentences*.

But does he learn them by heart, in rotation? Will he provide himself with a great stock of words, to keep them for future use? NO.

Here I will stop a moment; for, notwithstanding my formal declaration to the contrary, I must treat you and the reader with one more extract from *Nature Displayed;* it relates to that part of the subject which I am at present discussing, and plainly shows how closely you have watched nature:

"The fact that infants are instructed in language by detached phrases, and not otherwise, every discerning mother will be ready to acknowledge; for, if they were not taught in such a manner, until they retained the *vast catalogue* of the names of things, they would either remain speechless, or perhaps *mutter an unintelligible jargon*, like the confusion of tongues at the building of *Babel*. The reason of teaching a language by *phrases*, and not by *single words*, is obvious: the name of a thing, for instance, merely recalls an object to the mind, but it can neither express an action performed on it, nor convey an idea relative to it. *A word*, therefore, that *expresses no thought or action*, has no force by itself, and only serves as a link in the chain that makes up a phrase, or complete sense. Even supposing that an infant might learn a number of solitary words, yet being unacquainted with the sense of the phrases by which the mother *interrogates it*, it will naturally, *through fear*, *utter something;* it then follows, that an infant may as well utter the words *horse* or *house*, as *ox* or *elephant*, though the latter terms might be more applicable to the subject, and more pertinent in reply to the question. Thus, even if possessed of a long list of *unmeaning* sounds, or *mere names of things*, without any idea of their relative uses and qualities, the infantine palace of memory might truly be said to be furnished with useless lumber. What would it avail with respect to the acquisition of language, to know the names *of all animals* of the creation, the *necessary articles* of life, &c. without a *connexion?* Not a straw! Were the mental *store-house stocked* in such a manner, what would be the result? Ridicule! more laughable than the offspring of the fabled mountain!"

The above paragraph is followed by another quite as curious in every respect; but as the reader may read it in the original, with *many more* no less instructive, I will content myself by transcribing the beginning of it, in order to present the world with a singular instance of that instinctive sincerity naturally implanted in the heart of man, and stronger than reflection and will itself. You say, with an amiable *naïveté*, which does you great credit: "In short, there is *no need of argument* to prove that language is only a collection of sentences or phrases," &c. Any one a little versed

in these matters, is confident, that no sort of argument is to be met with in your book; but few, indeed, would have suspected that you had not tried your best to make some. Your candid declaration will be duly appreciated by every reader.

At any rate, argument or no argument, nobody can deny, that among many remarkable things in the foregoing extract, your flight upon the tower of Babel is particularly calculated to suggest awful ideas: only think, sir, if the motley multitude who were building it, had been in possession of your book! there is no telling, indeed, how far the designs of God might have been defeated.

Then, sir, without arguments, you take it for a fact, that infants are instructed in language by *detached phrases*, and *not otherwise*, for *no other reason* than that they would remain speechless, or mutter unintelligible jargon, *if they were taught a vast catalogue of the names of things?* Please, sir, to tell us the names of those discerning mothers, who have made you believe *that infants would have to learn a vast catalogue of names*, if they were not *taught by heart a vast catalogue of sentences.* You are a bachelor, I believe; may we not naturally suppose that you have never had much chance to judge for yourself, and that you have too implicitly relied upon the saying of some waggish mothers, who preferred sporting to contradicting you? Woman, sir, is the very creature to hit upon our weak side, and profit by it. Are you certain of not having suffered the penetrating female wit to perceive that your system was irrevocably framed, and that by all means you must have corroborative facts? Besides, you are sweet-tongued with the fair sex; in exchange for your compliments upon their fine eyes, rosy lips, and the like, may they not have thought it a good bargain to yield to you, that there were *but two ways* by which their babies could possibly learn their language, viz. by a vast series of sentences, or a vast catalogue of words? Hercules spinning at the feet of Omphale, is a serious hint to philosophers.

"The reason," say you, "that language is taught by sentences, not by single words, is, that the name of a thing *merely* recalls an *object* to the mind." Why! would you think it clearer if the name of a thing should recall two or three objects? This strange reason why language cannot be taught by words, is a curious specimen of your predilection for the complex. According to that singular doctrine, we should have a clearer idea of the word *one*, if it meant two or three at the same time. Or, you would, perhaps, like it better, if a word signified no object at all. Another convincing reason why language is not taught by words, is, that, instead of saying *horse*, the child would say *ox!* A tighter dialectic is seldom met with. Again: because each word, *bread*, for instance, does not, at the same time, signify *cut*, *eat*, *me*, *I*, it follows, that "*the child would have a long list of unmeaning sounds, of mere names of things, without any idea of their relative uses and*

qualities," which, of course, signifies, that in learning single words, a child would not learn their meaning, whereas in committing to memory a series of whole sentences, he would comprehend and learn the signification of their words! From a man who would still retain sufficient powers of perception to distinguish his nose from a needle-case, such reasoning would hardly be expected. At thoughts so extraordinary, the reader drops the book, rubs his eyes, and thinks that he has misunderstood the meaning of the author. Let us see again: "By learning by single words, a child would not get to the meaning of a sentence; but by committing whole sentences to memory, he would acquire the signification of the words." If that is not the substance of your paragraph, I must confess, that I neither comprehend a sentence nor a word of it. Yet, after consideration, and for the honour of human nature, I will not admit that you are capable of having conceived ideas so foolish. I prefer to see, in that so apparently absurd theorem of yours, a natural consequence of your total ignorance of the philosophy of human language, which has led you to spoil your premises with the term WORD, in a limited and unwarrantable acceptation. I am the more inclined to think, that by *words*, you only mean the *nouns of physical objects*, that you have several times explicitly intimated it, in the paragraph which ends thus: "What would avail, with respect to the acquisition of language, to know the names of all the *animals* of the creation, the *necessaries of life*, &c. without CONNEXION?" Then you very judiciously answer: "Not a straw." For once, I am happy to say, that my opinion coincides with yours; for it appears to me incontestable, that the knowledge of all the names of all the animals of the creation, and necessaries of life, ever so well known, would not enable a man to understand or speak a language; but how this constitutes a reason, why the learning of sentences ready made would teach the signification of words, and why language cannot be taught otherwise than by whole sentences by rote, is a thing which you did not choose to explain to us.

What are we then to infer from that doctrine of yours, sir? that your knowledge of the philosophy of human language extends just far enough to enable you to ascertain the existence of words, which are names of animals and necessaries of life, whilst it leaves you in the dark as to that of those which express their *relations* and *connexions*; and that your perceptive faculties are sufficiently acute to perceive, and make you comprehend, how children can learn the physical words, but that they are too blunt to make you sensible that *all words whatever are upon an equality in the system of nature.*

Ignorance, a want of acuteness, in a fellow creature, are defects to which we should all be indulgent; but who can help

laughing at the folly of him who pretends to make those very deficiencies of his mind subservient to his convincing others!

To resume my arguments, I say; Does the child learn by heart, in rotation, does he commit to memory, or, in other terms, does he make any provision of words, in order to have his mental *storehouse* provided for future use? I answer, NO: for such a thing is useless, it is impossible, it is absurd. *No vocal sign can be noticed, attended to, and learned by the child, before he feels an urgent want, which renders necessary the immediate and frequent use of that sign.* The child ostensibly begins the practical study of his mother tongue, as soon as he is made sensible that his *native language of pantomimic signs* begins to be inadequate to the expression of his increasing wants. It is *only then*, that his anxiety to communicate *what he feels*, disposes him to turn his attention to vocal sounds, which, before that moment, he did not mind any more than other common sounds. The first time a new want, expressed by the child in his native language, happens to be misunderstood, he is forcibly made to experience the necessity of some more successful mode of conveying his new idea; (3) it is about that time, that after many disappointments, the first vocal sign is at last guessed at, tried, ascertained, stammered over, and adopted for *incessant use*; for at that period of life, the same wants frequently recur, and so also, the terms which express them must be often resorted to. A child's wants are few, their increase is slow; therefore, plain common sense, (philosophy is nothing else,) tells us that the demand for new signs to express them, must bear an exact proportion with their moderate increase. This plain, lucid, and cautious onset of nature, displays at once before us the beautiful simplicity of her system of imparting knowledge to her pupil.

(3) If we attentively observe children at that epoch, we shall see that their bad humour, fretting, and cries, are the spiteful expressions, and utmost efforts of their disappointed pantomimic eloquence; it is the critical time when, made more and more sensible of the inadequacy of their native signs, they are prompted by necessity to turn their attention to vocal signs.

A child whose wants should be anticipated, would, I believe, make slow progress in the learning of his mother tongue. We ought not to consider as genuine progress, certain words and phrases, which parents and nurses teach to children, and make the latter repeat before friends and strangers, in order to render them more interesting; for the young ones most certainly do not understand the meaning of those words or sentences which may be said to have been learned *by heart*. There are few persons who are sufficiently aware how *infinitely simple* must be the things presented to the perception of little children; the practice of teaching words or phrases to them is extremely mischievous, because it occupies their minds to no useful purpose, and turns their attention from the *real lessons* of nature, with which they are *incessantly* engaged. Another thing that I would recommend to parents and nurses, is to speak sparingly to their children, and articulate and pronounce slowly, distinctly, and the best they can when addressing them: the infantine mode of speaking to little children with half articulated words, is pernicious, as it gives them a false idea of the vocal signs.

Is it necessary to be a great philosopher, to observe that a child twelve or fifteen months old, having but his immediate and limited wants to attend to, for the expression of which *he is provided with his native signs*, cannot be supposed to have the least occasion for the *names of the things which surround him, still less of all the animals of the creation* and *necessaries of life, &c.* ? Only look, sir, to a child at such an age, and you will see that his natural signs are fully sufficient to express the ideas which he cares for communicating; nay, you will soon perceive that those native signs impart his ideas more forcibly and successfully than we can express ours with the vernacular tongue.

We must conclude that the pupil of nature *does not* give up his *native signs*, because he begins the practical study of his mother tongue, but that he only seeks to supply the occasional partial deficiency and failure of natural signs, by corresponding vocal signs, of the virtue of which he is more and more convinced by experience.

When a child is heard to use a new word, we are then to conclude, that he has substituted a new sign, which is better understood, for a natural one, which answered not his purpose. When we hear a child speak even a *single word*, we must conclude, that he has expressed a *whole proposition* with his native signs, except the new word he has spoken, which new word fills the place of a natural sign, which experience has proved ineffective.

Thus it is that the pupil of nature is allowed to use his native signs, and never *compelled to care for*, notice, adopt, and learn a vocal sign, unless such sign has become necessary to fill the place of a natural sign misunderstood. Thus it is that the child, having a language of his own, which fails him but gradually, and *part after part only*, is but gradually led to adopt, use, and practise, *part after part only*, the vocal language as a necessary substitute: it follows, that he has no more occasion for a *vast number of words*, than for a series of sentences ready made. By that admirable process of substitution, which is a *literal translation*, not only the necessary names of things and animals are successively learned *in their proper season*, but *every word whatever*, expressing *connexion, relation*, and every combination; in short, language, with all its modulations, each particular, in its turn, and time, in conformity with the increase and succession of new wants, the necessity of expressing which is the *sole power* that gives the momentum to the progress of nature's pupil in the practical study of the vernacular language.

The limits which I have prescribed to myself, do not permit me to expatiate any longer upon this interesting subject, which, until the present day, has been too little attended to; but I hope I have sufficiently sketched its principal outlines, to enable my readers to

avail themselves of every-day experience, and examine more minutely nature's inimitable mode of teaching language to children.

Every thing in nature's system is distinct, clear, striking, slow, gradual, and effective; there is no hurry, no violence, in her operations; what is not learned now, will be wanted and comprehended at another moment; what is actually taught, is for present and incessant use. The lesson learned is well and for ever known, for its prototype is permanently impressed upon the feelings and the mind. No sentences by the lump, no vocabulary, no phrases by heart for future use, no rules by anticipation, no generalizing upon unknown things, for the sake of despatch; time is of no consequence; progress is the only object, and progress is constant and certain, for the scholar is paid by the master.

Such, sir, is the rough outline of nature's mode of teaching, which mode bears not the remotest resemblance to your wholesale, precipitated, chaotic teaching, diametrically different in all its parts, and necessarily pregnant with all the mischievous evils which result from an entire and constant violation of nature's immutable laws.

It is my intention to show, in my next and last letter, that the teaching of language *by heart*, *in rotation*, as you understand and practise it, is at variance with the relations which exist between language and the human intellect, that such process does not enter into nature's system, and that your adopting it, which plainly demonstrates your ignorance of the constitution of that mode of the mind called MEMORY, is itself sufficient to render your system of teaching absurd, fruitless, and hurtful.

I am your servant,

J. MANESCA.

LETTER IV.

MR. DUFIEF,

I consider the subject of this letter an important one, which concerns not only you, but all men whose profession is to convey knowledge to their fellow creatures. That subject is MEMORY.

We have not as yet a sound theory of the human intellect, and the nature of memory is consequently little understood; it is not surprising, therefore, that that mode of the mind is so greatly misused in the general system of schools, and that you, sir, with some writers whose errors you have adopted, are of opinion, that to learn a language, nothing is necessary but to commit to memory *a vast number of words*, or *an octavo full of sentences*. You have given the preference to sentences; and my readers, I hope, are now perfectly acquainted both with your reasons for having made so exquisite a choice, and mine for having condemned it.

But, sir, when you first planned the teaching of a language by heart, did you not question, for once, the possibility of so tremendous an intellectual

feat? (1) I admit that, with the assistance of metaphors, one finds no great difficulty in converting the human intellect into a *store house*, (2) a repository, a palace, or even a side-pocket; but it is not so easily conceived how the human mind can be replenished with ideas in the same manner, and as easily, as a side-pocket can be filled with pennies, or a palace with furniture. I believe I have already hinted, that figures of rhetoric may do very well for newspaper advertisements, but that they will never agree with speculative philosophy.

You must undoubtedly possess a most extensive and powerful memory; you, who have never questioned the possibility of learning your big book of phrases by heart—you, who speak of committing a whole language by rote, with as much *sang froid* as if you spoke of eating an oyster! What do you think, then, of favouring us with a small specimen of your retentive faculties? Just recite to us *three pages* of your *Nature Displayed;* or, if you like it better, only repeat unhesitatingly *three hundred words* of your mother tongue. You cannot but find this last feat an easy one, for *you know by heart the words of your own language;* open your mental storehouse, they will, no doubt, rush out at your command. Will you have something still easier? recite backwards even the title page of your own book, which (*I mean the title page*) you most certainly must know by heart.

Why, sir, to recite backwards your title page, is above your power! You cannot repeat three hundred words of your mother tongue, every one of which, you have a thousand times used in your life!—You, who have composed your book, written it, copied it over for the press, read, corrected, and revised it many times; you, who have taught thousands of scholars with it, who, in short, should know it *by heart*, are unable even to recite three pages of it! and still you pretend that, in *thirty-six lessons*, given in a time hardly sufficient for any one to read the half of it through, you pretend, I say, that a scholar can learn, *pronounce*, retain, and know its contents, so as to make a practical use of them, according to the flow of his ideas, and with the velocity of his thoughts! Indeed, sir, when you contrived the wild project of teaching language by heart, you must have put aside all the suggestions of common sense, or made a most extraordinary estimate of the superiority of the minds of your fellow mortals, over your own! (3)

(1)What a delicious task it would be, to learn by heart a full octavo of Chinese sentences. It must be observed, that the time prescribed by Mr. Dufief, to learn those sentences, that is, to make a good scholar in French, Spanish, or the Chinese language, would not suffice to read his book through once.

(2) When we see the mighty mind of Locke prostrated before those shadows, can we refrain from pitying human nature, and trembling for ourselves?

(3) We are at a loss to imagine what conception Mr Dufief has formed of human *memory* and *language*, when we see him presuming to convey any idea of the latter, by overloading the former, with a full book of phrases of the following description: (see his vocabulary, p. 1.)—"Lend me *one* of your books; he has just broken *one* of the bottles; he lives *three* doors from here; his *grandfather* was a hundred years old when he died; his *grandmother* is still alive; his *great-grandfather* died last year; he is *grandson* of a very learned man: his *brother* is a merchant in Jamaica: his *sister* was married to a sea-captain."

MEMORY, sir, considered as the recollection of past ideas, *is not a positive faculty*, which is dependent on man's *will;* for if it were so, a person who is said to have a good memory, would be enabled to recollect, at his will, his past ideas; any man could remember at pleasure, things which he knew best, the words of his own language, for instance, which is evidently not the case. If *memory* were a positive faculty, depending on volition, as are seeing, walking, speaking, eating, for instance; we could as readily recite backwards the song which we sing, with so great ease, from the beginning to the end. Let any man try to repeat two or three scores of the words of his own language; after the first dozen or two, which will certainly be the *names of surrounding objects*, or of those things he is most familiar with, he will begin to flag, and find himself at a loss, notwithstanding his best exertions, which evidently proves that memory is no more at the disposal of our will, than the circulation of our blood is. It is in consequence of that constitutional principle of memory, that the child under the tuition of nature, increases his stock of words very slowly, and uses for a great while those he has already received, before he admits a new one.

What is *memory* but the necessary result of associations? By associations, we must understand the immediate connexion between antecedents and consequents.

When, for instance, we count one, two, three, four, &c. we repeat these numbers with much more facility than when we say them backwards. Why? because, from our infancy, we have been used to associate *one* with *two*, two with three, and so on; whilst we have not so well attended to the inverted order of those numbers; that is, 20 before 19, 19 before 18, and so on, which causes the latter associations to be weaker than the former; and consequently, our memory is readier in the direct than the inverted order. Memory, therefore, depends altogether upon associations.

In every individual, memory is exactly the consequence of the associations of his own ideas! The more a man's ideas are diversely associated, the more *chance* each of them has to be actually recalled by any one of them present in his mind, and the greater then is his memory. The less the past ideas of a man are associated with each other, the less is the

Without knowing a word of French, any person has only to peruse the English part of Mr. Dufief's book, to be satisfied that there is no more connexion any where to be found between his sentences, than there is among those I have just quoted. For my part, I do not see in those phrases any thing besides what is to be met with in those which might be extracted from any book; and I have tried my best to discover in those sentences, that wonderful secret, which nature has revealed to Mr. Dufief, but I have tried in vain; I believe the best account of this wonderful secret, which Mr. D. himself could give of it, is as follows:—I impress a particular word of each sentence upon my scholar's mind, which word is necessarily associated with the rest of the sentence, and will not fail *when recollected*, to cause the whole sentence to be remembered. His *grandfather*, for instance, will suggest to the mind the remainder of the sentence, *was a hundred years old when he died.* Besides, it is "*incontrovertible*" that his *grandfather* will at any time recall his *grandmother*, and the latter being in like manner associated to, *is still alive*, will most surely occasion the recollection of it. Then, as his *grandmother* is in close intimacy with his *great-grandfather*, she will start him up, who, in his turn, will stir up his *grandson*, who will elbow his *brother*, who will wake his *sister*, and so on, from the beginning of my book to its end; for, like nature's, all *my system* is linked together—*with italics.*

chance that one of those ideas actually in the mind, will reproduce one of the other past ideas; the less, therefore, is his memory.

A person who should have never learned the numbers in any other way than from one to two, two to three, &c. which we may call the *simplest associations*, would not be able, without the greatest effort, to recite the numbers in the inverted order; if he had learned and equally practised numbers in both orders, he would, with equal facility, repeat them in both directions. It might be said that such a person knew numbers by two associations, and his memory, with respect to numbers, would be exactly double that of him who should know them by one association only. But, if a person, besides learning numbers by these two associations, had been used to associate in his mind, one with three, three with five, five with seven, and so on, it is equally evident, that this memory, with regard to numbers, would be extended by a treble association, and, consequently, be more extensive than that of him who could only repeat them in the direct and inverted order.

Thus, by increasing the number of associations, we might suppose a man who, at the actual idea of any given number, would, without effort, without any interference of *his will*, immediately think of any number whatever. Such a man would possess the *maximum* of memory with respect to numbers. Now, such is the *memory* requisite to master a language with the velocity of thought; and that *memory*, which evidently is the effect of a multiplication of associations, is an acquired faculty.

When a man actually remembers a past idea, it is because the idea which immediately preceded it, that is, *its antecedent*, has brought it into his mind.

When a man cannot recollect a past idea, it is because the actual idea in his mind is not associated, or not sufficiently associated, with the wished-for past idea. A being whose each individual idea should be equally associated with every one of his other ideas, would at the same time remember all his ideas at once. Such a being would possess the maximum of universal memory. He would have at the same moment in his mind, all his past and present ideas. God is the only intelligence whom we can suppose to possess such an infinite memory. A being whose individual idea should be associated with none of his past ideas, would have no memory at all. The human intellect lies, and is graduated, between those two extremes, and it approaches the one or the other in proportion to *the thinking* faculties as they are more or less exerted. Teachers of youth, reflect upon this!

Thinking is an act of the mind which multiplies associations. He who thinks more, acquires more memory upon the subject of his thoughts; he who thinks less, has less memory. That memory which consists in recollecting series, dates, ideas, words or sentences in rotation; in short, that memory which is the result of the simplest associations, is the memory of the unthinking; it may be useful for some professions, but, in my humble opinion, it is the bane of sound teaching and genuine learning.

We know things, we master and use them, in the same manner that we have learned them. There are things which we need not know otherwise than by the simplest associations, that is, from the beginning to the end; a song, for instance, is sufficiently known, when learned from its first to its last word; there is no necessity to learn it from its end to its beginning. But is language a song? Allow me, sir, to relate to you a little story which has just been brought to my mind by associations.

"How is the wind, Bob?" asked the captain of a ship, addressing the steersman. "Nord-east-by-Nord, sir," was the instantaneous answer of the tar. A jocular monk, who was a passenger, drew near the sailor; "My son," said he to him, "I heard thee swear like a demon during the storm; dost thou know thy prayers as well as thy sea-compass?" "No," replied Bob, "for I can tell you, father, that I know my sea-compass a damn sight better than even *you* knew your prayers." "Thou art joking, son;" "Quite in earnest, father." Upon this, our tar began thus: "Nord—nord-west-by-nord—nord-nord-west," and so on, till he had turned round and got to the Nord again. "Now, father," said Bob, "try your turn." The monk recited his *pater noster* in a very handsome style. "That is clever," observed the son of Neptune; "'tis mine now." Then he went on, "Nord Nord-east-by-Nord—Nord-nord-east, &c., till he had come to the word again. "Well, father," said he with a grin, "give us your prayer backwards." "Backwards! I can't boy: I have never learned it but in one way; it is not necessary." "Then," observed the triumphant sailor, "I know my sea-compass better than you know your prayers, for I can tell it in a thousand ways." Bob has just told us how a language must be learned and known.

For a language is not a song, or a prayer, or the sum of a certain number of words or sentences constantly succeeding each other in the same order, invariably presenting to the mind the same antecedents and consequents; language *is* the result of the *infinite combinations* of a *finite number of words;* and in order to know and use it, as it is, we must *learn* and *practise it* in every possible order, so that, by multiplying associations, and extending infinitely the memory, we may enable ourselves to compose it with the velocity of thought.

Let us suppose an immense circle, each point of the circumference of which communicates with every other point, and with an *intelligent eye* in the centre, at whose least wink, any of those points, or *combinations of them*, flash in and out with the rapidity of lightning: such is language in its relations to the human mind.

No man can pretend to be master of a language, till the associations of words and their combinations have been uninterruptedly carried on by him to their ultimate limits. Nothing shows more evidently the ignorance of the nature of memory, than the idea, that the practical knowledge of a language can be acquired upon the benches of a school, or in the pages of a book. Upon the teacher, and the *first outset*, depends, indeed, the success or total failure of the pupil. An intelligent teacher may devise the best means to facilitate the multiplication of associations, and make the task of a scholar comparatively easy; but, farther than that, the extent of memory necessary to master a language, depends wholly upon industry, practice, and time.

If, in the course of these letters, I have been so fortunate as to express my ideas with sufficient clearness, it must appear evident to you, sir, and to my other readers:

1st, That whole sentences ready made, constitute not the *elements* of language.

2dly, That nature does not teach language to man by whole sentences ready made, as you do.

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3dly, That teaching by heart in rotation, that is, by the *simplest association*, which does very well for a song, is *infinitely* insufficient for language from which truth it follows, that your mode of teaching phrases by heart in rotation, is *infinitely insufficient*.

4thly, That the teaching of language is not such a *bagatelle*, and the acquiring of it so light a business, as you think them to be; which fourth and last proposition should be strongly impressed upon the mind of youth and the public, in order that they who wish to acquire, in a *proper manner*, the knowledge of the French, Spanish, or any other living language, may be enabled to estimate the deserts of a teacher, and form a correct idea of the *attention*, *industry*, and perseverance, necessary to carry their contemplated undertaking to a happy termination.

Here, sir, before I close this letter, I will only add, that in all which I have said against your mode of teaching, as it is expounded in your *Nature Displayed*, I have taken for granted, that your plan was followed by an intelligent teacher, like yourself, for instance, with one *single scholar*; for I could not, for a single moment, entertain so mean an opinion of the common sense of mankind, as to believe that they would not readily perceive the effects of your *circular* process, when applied to a numerous class; and I trust, that the public will now understand the true import of your favourite phrase, "*the more the better.*"

I am your obedient servant,

J. MANESCA.